



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

CALI CARTEL LEADER MAKES INITIAL COURT APPEARANCE IN MIAMI

MIAMI, FLA – Michael J. Garcia, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Attorney General John Ashcroft; Marcos Daniel Jiménez, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida; and Robert J. Joura, Acting Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), announced that Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela made his initial appearance in federal district court in Miami on Monday, December 6, 2004, after being extradited from Colombia to the United States over the weekend.

Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela faces narcotics trafficking and money laundering charges in the Southern District of Florida, where a four-count Superseding Indictment is pending against him and ten (10) other named defendants, including his brother, Miguel Rodriguez-Orejuela, both of whom are named in the Attorney General's Consolidated Priority Organization Target (CPOT) list, and are the alleged leaders and founders of the infamous Cali Cartel.

The charges pending against Gilberto and Miguel Rodriguez-Orejuela are the result of a fourteen (14) year investigation in the Southern District of Florida known as "Operation Cornerstone," which began in 1991. Since 1996, the United States Attorney's Office in the Southern District of Florida has sought the extradition of Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela.

ICE led the investigation resulting in the extradition of Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela, with assistance from the DEA. Colombian law enforcement officials also cooperated in the investigation. "Operation Cornerstone" has resulted in the seizure of almost 50,000 kilograms of cocaine and \$15,000,000 in United States currency. Prior to the initial Indictment in this case, almost 100 other defendants, including some of the defendants' criminal defense attorneys, were successfully prosecuted during the course of the investigation.

All of the defendants named in the Superseding Indictment are charged with conspiracy to import cocaine and conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine. Gilberto and Miguel Rodriguez-Orejuela and five (5) other defendants are charged with conspiracy to launder money. If convicted on the conspiracy drug trafficking charges, the defendants would face a maximum statutory sentence of life imprisonment on each

count. If convicted on the conspiracy money laundering charge, the defendants named in that count would face a maximum statutory sentence of twenty (20) years' imprisonment.

The Superseding Indictment seeks the forfeiture of two billion, one hundred million dollars in United States currency (\$2,100,000,000), which represents moneys received in exchange for and used to facilitate the distribution of controlled substances and the amount of money involved in the money laundering conspiracy.

"At one time, Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela and his organization were believed to be responsible for about 80 percent of the cocaine shipped to the United States, as well as countless murders and a reign of terror in Colombia. Today, Gilberto is under arrest in the United States, where he ranks as arguably the highest-level drug trafficking figure to ever occupy a U.S. prison cell. This unprecedented accomplishment represents the culmination of a 14-year investigation by ICE agents in Miami and Colombia, in conjunction with Colombian law enforcement and the DEA," said Michael J. Garcia, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

"Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela is alleged to have trafficked in illegal drugs that tear at the fabric of society and draw the innocent away from safe and productive lives," said Attorney General John Ashcroft. "Those who violate federal drug laws should never believe that drug trafficking from outside our borders puts them beyond the reach of justice. Thanks to the hard work of law enforcement officers both here and abroad, Rodriguez-Orejuela will now stand trial for his actions."

Mr. Jiménez stated, "This is a watershed moment in our nation's war against drugs. Our prosecution puts drug traffickers on notice that no matter where they are or who they are, they will eventually be brought to justice. After more than a decade of hard work, I am extremely proud that our prosecutors in the Southern District of Florida and our law enforcement partners made this day a reality."

"The extradition of Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela marks the beginning of the end of another chapter of the United States and Colombia's war against narcotraffickers," said Mr. Jaura. "Despite having been incarcerated since 1995, Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela has continued to wield significant influence among cocaine trafficking organizations in that country. His extradition is a tribute to the resolve of the Government of Colombia and the effort of US authorities."

Mr. Jiménez commended the investigative efforts of ICE and DEA. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Laurence Bardfeld of the Southern District of Florida. Assistant United States Attorneys Edward Ryan and Lisa Hirsch also have participated in the prosecution of the case.

Gilberto and Miguel Rodriguez-Orejuela also were recently indicted in New York on charges of conspiring to launder money in violation of an executive order. This executive order was signed by President William J. Clinton in 1995 under the authority of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. The Rodriguez-Orejuelas were placed on this list as a result of "Operation Cornerstone." Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela was brought first to Miami to face the charges stemming from "Operation Cornerstone."

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.